

A discourse occasioned by the burning of the theatre in the city of Richmond, Virginia, on the twenty-sixth of December, 1811.

[???]The Reader will here find a literal Copy of the resolutions of that section of the Medical Class, composed of native Virginians, expressive of their feelings on the occasion of the Fire at Richmond. Also the Discourse of the Rev. Dr. Alexander, which was originally published at the request of the Committee.—A list of the names of the Gentlemen who composed the meeting, is also attached.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

January 1, 1812.

At a meeting of upwards of one hundred natives of Virginia, composing a part of the Medical Class of the University of Pennsylvania, the following resolutions were offered by an appointed committee, and adopted as expressive of their piercing and deep sorrow for the loss of their connexions, friends and countrymen, in the late disastrous and ever to be lamented fire, at Richmond.

1. Resolved,—That although far removed from the scene of distress, our hearts are penetrated with the keenest agonies of sympathy at a catastrophe so unparalleled in destruction;—and that our most sincere and unfeigned condolence is offered to the relatives of those whose mournful fate it has been thus prematurely to be hurried to that “country from whose bourne no traveller returns.”
2. Resolved,—That each of us wear a crape on the left arm for the space of one month, as a token of respect to the memory of our departed relatives, friends and countrymen.

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3. Resolved,—That a committee be appointed to wait on the Rev. Dr. Alexander, and request the favour of an appropriate Discourse on Wednesday next;—and that we assemble at the University at ten o'Clock on that day, and walk in procession to the Church.

4. Resolved,—That these proceedings be published in Duane's and Relf's papers.

John Pretlow,

John Dove,

Moore G. Fontleroy,

Thomas Allen,

Wm. S. Morton,

James W. Hunt,

Hugh F. Rose,

John F. Christian,

Samuel G. Fontleroy,

Isaac Smith,

John W. King,

Andrew Gresham,

Thomas R. Fisher,

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William H. Henning,

Uriel Terril,

James Blair,

iii

John A. Jones,

N. Payne,

John Meredith,

James Wilson,

Wm. M. Fall,

Samuel Garland,

Wm. M. Morgan,

Churchill J. Blackburn,

John Bankhead,

William E. Gibson,

Alexander Muschett,

Thomas F. Tibbs,

Henry Brundieg,

Beverly Smith,

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George D. Baylor,

Lee Griggs,

John Seevers,

W. B. Westmore,

Samuel P. Hargrave,

Wm. Jones,

Tingnal Jones,

John C. Grosjean,

Josiah Holt,

N. C. Whitehead,

Charles B. Ball,

John R. Walke,

Harmer Gilmer,

Austin Jennings,

Edmond P. Taylor,

John Field,

John P. Jacobs,

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Henry Lewis,

T. T. Strachan,

John Minor,

Reuben D. Palmer,

Charles W. Carter,

Robert L. Cobbs,

G. B. Williams,

Henry Skipwith,

George Wilson,

Jesse Cole,

R. Povall, M.D.

W. T. Scott,

John H. M'Cabe,

J. Colquhoun,

J. H. Ball,

S. Patteson,

C. H. Meriweather,

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W. Goodwin,

W. Flemming,

Richard May,

Mayo C. Watkins,

Horace Wellford,

Peyton Grimes,

M. C. Buck,

G. W. Russel,

G. W. May,

W. Gunnell,

Mann Page,

W. Brown,

L. H. Mosby,

R. A. Carrington,

W. S. Quesenberry,

H. Stannard,

W. N. Minor,

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W. Chapman,

Wm. V. Taylor,

R. P. Warner,

W. P. Jones,

Ch. Taylor,

W. M. Alexander,

Cary Barraud,

John S. Mills,

C. C. Lynch.

iv

Thomas Ruffin,

W. Eggleston,

S. I. Cabell,

J. H. Noel,

P. B. Tindall,

P. E. Graves, M.D.

Lewis Carr,

W. E. Horner,

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D. Burwell,

Daniel Wilson, M.D.

C. T. Radford,

T. W. Jones,

R. Murphy,

Jas. T. Stephens,

P. P. Wycke,

N. Allen,

J. Sanders,

J. S. Hardaway,

J. Cabaniss,

S. Winder.

John Paton,

T. Sheppard,

A. W. Clopton,

Hard Lane,

J. Blount,

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J. L. Miller,

R. M. Stribbling,

T. H. Read,

R. B. Stark,

T. Dudley,

J. R. Shumate,

J. C. Webb,

J. Williams,

S. Pleasants,

Robert Miller, M.D.

M. Bailey,

R. R. Barton,

L. R. Robertson,

Geo. W. Gunnel,

Berryman Green,

T. P. Luckett.

A DISCOURSE OCCASIONED By The Burning of the Theatre IN THE CITY OF
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, ON THE TWENTY-SIXTH OF DECEMBER, 1811.

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BY WHICH AWFUL CALAMITY A large humor of valuable lives were lost.

Delivered in the Third Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on the eight day of January, 1812, at the request of the Virginia Students attached to the Medical Class, in the University of Pennsylvania.

BY A. ALEXANDER, D.D.

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FOR DANIEL WILSON, M. D.

1812.

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DISCOURSE.

ROM. XII. 15. “ *WEEP WITH THEM THAT WEEP.* ”

M. L. B. 17 May '22

ONE leading difference between the system of ethics prescribed by the Stoics, and that inculcated by Christianity is, that whilst the former aims at eradicating the passions, the latter endeavours to regulate them, and direct them into their proper channels. The attempt of the first is as impracticable as is undesirable; the object of the last, is, by divine aid, in a good degree attainable, and in it consists much of the dignity, perfection, and happiness of man.

The great Author of our being has implanted the principle of sympathy deeply in human nature; and has made the susceptibility of feeling the sorrows of another, as extensive as the race of man. It is common to the untutored savage, and to the man of refinement and education: and traces of it are even discovered in the animal creation; many species of

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which appear to be strongly excited, as often as any great evil threatens, or befalls, any of their own kind.

This principle of sympathy, whilst it indicates the unity of our species, seems to form a mysterious bond of connexion between all its members. 8 The spectacle of suffering humanity, however great a stranger the object of distress may be, will always excite our sensibility, unless the feelings be blunted by vicious indulgence, restrained by prejudice, or extinguished by the long prevalence of malignant passions. Simply considered, it is not of a moral nature; it is, however, friendly to virtue, and intimately mingles itself with the most benevolent and pious affections of the human heart: and the want of it always argues a high degree of moral depravity. Refined and cultivated, as it may be by education, it has a great share in forming the character which is termed *amiable* and *interesting*. But like other original principles of our nature, is liable to abuse and excess: and the evils thence resulting to human happiness, are not few nor inconsiderable. Instead of being the ally of virtue, and prompter of benevolence, it may become the most successful auxiliary of vice. In fact, a morbid sensibility has, with many in this age, usurped the place, and claimed the honour, due to moral principle and religion. Genuine pity, and compassion for objects of real distress, have been perverted, and almost extinguished, in a multitude of persons, by the artificial excitement of a set of spurious feelings, produced by the contemplation of scenes of fictitious distress; which tend to no valuable end, and are sought only for the momentary gratification of the possessor. But, however sympathy may be abused, there is a legitimate and proper exercise 9 of it, to which we are not only prompted by nature, but directed by reason, and exhorted by religion. There are occasions, when not to “weep with them that weep,” would be rebellion against every principle which ought to govern us, as well as against those which commonly do influence men. If the sufferings of an enemy may be such as to affect us—if we are excited to weep at the woes. of a stranger—what must our feelings be, when we recognise, in the cry of unutterable anguish, the well known voice of an acquaintance, a friend, a brother, or a sister? Such a cry of distress, from the capital of our native state, has recently pierced our ears, and filled our hearts with grief.

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The sons of Virginia, resident in this place, are to-day called upon to mourn, and to mingle their sympathetic tears with those of the whole state.

A calamity, as great and distressing, as it was sudden and unexpected, has fallen upon her! A calamity, which in its circumstances of real wo and great distress, has scarcely a parallel in history! In most occurrences which pierce the soul with anguish, there are some alleviating considerations which sooth the aching heart, and mitigate the pangs of grief. But here there are none! Every fresh recital, every additional circumstance, only serves to increase the horror of the scene, and more deeply to interest our feelings. Had her honourable men and valuable citizens fallen in the field of battle, like those of a sister state, bravely resisting the enemies of their country, and covered 10 with honourable wounds, however bereaving and distressing the dispensation, still there would have existed some ground of consolation. Had her respected matrons and fair daughters been swept off by the desolating pestilence, however melancholy the scene, yet still there would have been some warning, and some opportunity of preparing for the event. The last words, and the last looks of tenderness and affection, would have left a pleasing impression upon the memory: and at least, surviving friends would have enjoyed the satisfaction of beholding the bodies of their beloved relatives entire and unmangled; and of gazing upon their well know features undeformed with burns and bruises. But even this meagre consolation was wanting. In the midst of health—in the moment of mirth and exhilaration, in the full flow of earthly joy, perfectly thoughtless of futurity, and unsuspecting of any danger, more than a hundred respectable citizens, are overwhelmed in one promiscuous ruin! Neither genius, learning, power, wealth, youth, beauty, nor accomplishments, avail any thing to rescue their unfortunate possessors from destruction. Almost as rapid as the fall of lightning from heaven, Death, in his most frightful and resistless form, rushes on them! O! the dismal scene of horror, of misery, and of death, which here presents itself to our view!—But to pourtray this shocking scene is neither practicable nor desirable. Permit me, then, *to drop the curtain over the castrophe of this dismal tragedy!* 11 The impression which this awful occurrence has already made on your minds is indelible. You need no

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highly wrought description to make it deeper. The lapse of time can never obliterate it. The wound in the feelings of some here present, will never be completely healed, on this side the grave! The mere circumstance, that these unfortunate sufferers were creatures of our species, would have been sufficient to awaken all our tender sympathies; and much more, to know that they were our countrymen, who had been accustomed to breathe the same air and tread the same soil, and had been nurtured and educated in the same institutions with ourselves. But the ties by which most of you, my young countrymen, who have consecrated this day to sorrow, are connected with the unfortunate sufferers and disconsolate mourners of Richmond, are of a much more intimate and tender nature. To many of you, this sad catalogue of death, presented the names of much esteemed friends and intimate acquaintances; to some, of beloved relatives; and alas! to one or more, the first intelligence of their misfortune, was conveyed by the distressing sight of the *endeared name of a sister!* It is not surprising therefore, that you feel sensibly on this occasion: Nature constrains you to weep, and Religion approves it. Tears are becoming, even in the manly countenance, when distresses like these pass in review before our eyes, and approach so near to our bosoms.

12

But if this disastrous occurrence, by the mere recital, has produced such poignant anguish here, what must have been the feelings of those on the spot, who were both witnesses and partakers of the calamity! Our conceptions, as well as our words, are here altogether inadequate; and we are therefore incapable of fully sympathising with their sufferings. But if we could, the scene is such as to revolt all our feelings. The idea of such distress is, to the mind of sensibility, intolerable. Here then let us pause, and not attempt to enter more minutely into the melancholy detail of the events of that dreadful night.

“Boast not thyself, O man! of to-morrow!” See what a day—an hour, may bring forth! Behold a flourishing city, from the height of exultation and prosperity, cast down into the deepest abyss of grief and misery! The voice of mirth and joy are exchanged for the voice of wailing, lamentation, and wo, in all her dwellings! Lately, she appeared arrayed in the

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robes of gaiety and splendor, but now she sitteth disconsolate, in the sable garments of sorrow! Her face, recently animated with hope, and brightened with joy, is now distorted with anguish, and defiled with weeping! As a widow she sitteth solitary, and those who should comfort her, are removed from her sight. *Have pity upon her, O ye her friends! Have pity upon her, for the hand of God hath touched her!*

13

In order to form a just estimate of the extent and magnitude of this calamity, not only to the city of Richmond, but to the state at large, (and may I not say to the United States?) we must take a cursory view of the names inscribed on this *catalogue* of death.* The king of terrors, when personified, is commonly represented as going forth with his destructive weapon cutting down old and young, male and female, rich and poor, the honourable and obscure, with a promiscuous sweep; but in the present instance, the ruthless tyrant, seems to have made a discrimination, in the selection of his prey. Wealth, talents, youth, and beauty, were, in this instance, the objects of his fatal shafts.

* The list of the unfortunate sufferers.

The first on the list, is the respected governor and chief magistrate of the state, who had only a few days before this melancholy event, been raised to that high station, by the voice of the representatives of the people; and who, it is intimated, like some others, perished in the generous attempt to rescue some beloved friend from the flames. By a premature death, his country is deprived of his services for ever, and a wife and five weeping orphans left to deplore their irreparable loss!

Next in order, we find the name of the president of the Bank of Virginia; a man, whose vigorous mind was highly improved and richly furnished: long known as a useful and active member C 14 of the supreme legislature of the nation, where he was distinguished for the extent and accuracy of his information. And not less qualified for the important station which he lately occupied, by unsuspected integrity and unshaken firmness of character,

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united with habits of strict order and correctness, in the management of business. He was, moreover, in private life, uniformly mild and amiable; remarkable for sweetness of temper and urbanity of manners. And although he has left neither wife nor children to deplore their loss, yet his untimely and unhappy end, will long be the subject of bitter lamentation, in a large circle of respectable and affectionate friends and connections.

The speaker hopes to be indulged in offering this small tribute of respect to the memory of a useful citizen, with whom he has had the honour of an acquaintance for many years; and he regrets that the want of personal acquaintance, prevents him from doing justice to the characters of others, who may be equally distinguished. This deficiency, however, be amply compensated by those who enjoyed the pleasure of their acquaintance.

I will only add, that in the list of the deceased, we find the names, of an eminent attorney, whose wife also perished with him; of a promising young officer of the Navy of the United States; of several highly respectable merchants; and of one or more strangers of distinction.

15

That view of this mournful catalogue, however, which more especially interests our tender feelings, and awakens all the exquisite sensibilities of our nature, is the large number of respectable females, it contains. Was there ever before an unfortunate city which had equal cause of grief and lamentation, on this account! O Richmond! how art thou fallen! Who will not drop a tear over thy misfortunes! Thy glory, thy pride, and thy beauty; are brought down to the dust, and the dark cloud of sorrow has overshadowed thee, and turned thy day into night!

But that which should excite our sensibility to the utmost, and wind up all our sympathetic feelings to the highest pitch, is, that the greater part were young ladies, in the very prime and bloom of life! About one half the names in the whole catalogue are of persons of this description. O! who can think, without exquisite anguish, of so many gay and blooming

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virgins, decorated with the charms of beauty, and accomplished by the refinements of art, delicate and tender to excess, and accustomed only to caresses and endearments, perishing by a death so cruel, and by torments so excruciating! Who can describe the chasm which has been made in numerous respectable families; and the agony which has been, and is still endured! Tell us, ye bereaved mothers, (if words can express it,) the pangs which have rent your breaking hearts since you beheld the scorched, bruised, and disfigured bodies of your once beautiful daughters.

16

“In Rama,” of old, “a voice of lamentation and weeping and great mourning was heard: Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not:” And now of late, a cry of anguish equally as bitter has proceeded from Richmond! O how many inconsolable Rachels are there this day, who weep for their children, and refuse to be comforted! The hoary head of the indulgent father too, must now come down with sorrow to the grave! Perhaps, the last prop and solace of his declining years, as well as the darling of his heart, is for ever gone from his sight!

The helpless widow, and the orphaned children also, lift up their deploring hands, and their streaming eyes to heaven, expressing thereby, feelings of grief and agony, to which all words are inadequate.

And, why need I attempt to describe the poignant pangs of the disappointed lover, (the day of whose nuptials might perhaps have been fixed,) when he beholds the beauty which he so much idolized, transformed into a frightful and deformed skeleton!

But the shock of this awful stroke is not only felt in the city of Richmond, and its immediate vicinity, but in distant and remote parts of the state. Several of the young ladies who unfortunately perished in the flames, resided at a distances where they had numerous, respectable, and affectionate connections, through all the ramifications 17 of which, this occurrence will diffuse the most heart-felt sorrow!

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With some, perhaps, it was the first visit of any length which they ever made from their father's house. O! fatal visit! Methinks, I see the fond mother taking the last leave of her beloved daughter, little suspecting that it was the last! Or, shall I fancy, that some unaccountable foreboding seizes her mind, and oppresses her heart, as the object of her fond hopes and anxious fears is carried from her sight!

But, who shall attempt to imagine what her situation and feelings are, when the day arrives which should bring a letter from her affectionate child? A letter comes 'tis true; but what horror chills the blood, when it is seen not to be inscribed in the well known hand of the dear girl; and is addressed to the father instead of the mother. Methinks I see his veteran hand tremble, whilst he breaks the ominous seal! And the countenance which had remained unmoved, whilst death was braved at the cannon's mouth, now turns pale as ashes, whilst he reads the few incoherent sentences, by which he is made to realize more than ever the gloomiest hour had painted on his imagination!

Distressed family! What on earth can give you comfort? This world can never afford another taste of joy to you. All its most flattering scenes and fascinating appearances must henceforth be considered as deceitful and illusive. But one resource remains. — Religion is the only cure for griefs like these: But even piety itself may for awhile swell the torrent of distress. “O!” says the pious mother, “why did I ever consent to let her go out of my sight; what sin and folly have I been guilty of, to commit her to the gaieties and dissipation of the metropolis! My poor girl is for ever gone; but I am to blame for her premature and awful death; O could she have been permitted to die a natural death at home; or any kind of death, whilst engaged in serious and pious exercises, I would have been contented! But O! to be burnt alive!—To die in the theatre! To be snatched in a moment from time to eternity! To be hurried instantly from thoughtless gaiety to the bar of GOD! The idea is too dreadful! What soul can endure it! Gracious Heaven! send relief to a heart bursting with grief!”

This may be said, to be in part, a fancied case. But O! the reality, in this calamity, goes far beyond the powers of imagination.

These last remarks were suggested by the recollection of a modest and amiable young lady, whom I happened to see, when on a visit to Virginia last summer, in company with a pious mother, at a solemn religious meeting, where she appeared to be deeply interested and to enter very devotionally into the exercises of the day: but alas! in looking over this melancholy list (if I mistake not) I find her name enrolled. She perished in the flames on the fatal twenty-sixth of December!

19

It may perhaps be expected by some of my hearers, that I should enter into some discussion, relative to the nature and moral tendency of theatrical exhibitions. But various considerations influence me to waive this discussion for the present. However, I feel it to be incumbent on me, without intending to censure those who think differently, or expecting to make any considerable impression on a public excessively devoted to these amusements, to give my public TESTIMONY against them, as being, notwithstanding the partial good which may result from them, on the whole, UNFRIENDLY TO PIETY—UNFRIENDLY TO MORALITY—UNFRIENDLY TO HEALTH—UNFRIENDLY TO DOMESTIC HAPPINESS—AND UNFRIENDLY TO TRUE DELICACY AND GENUINE REFINEMENT —And sure I am, that allowing all to this institution, which its warmest advocates claim for it, it will not, in a thousand years repair to the community, the loss of which it has, in this instance been, unfortunately the occasion.

One other observation, I am constrained to make upon this subject, and that is,—that those of the inhabitants of this place, and other places in our country, who do not even suspend their attendance on public amusements, in consequence of the alarming dispensation which has occurred, for a single day, clearly evince a destitution of a tender and amiable sympathy with their suffering fellow citizens; and also discover a state of society, the 20 most alarming to the reflecting mind, which can easily be conceived. If

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there be a moral conclusion clearly deducible from the records of history, it is, that such an infatuated devotion to pleasure, in the midst of threatening judgments, and public calamities, is a certain indication of a people being ripe for ruin, and a sure forerunner of it. As for you, my young friends, I hope that you will fully evince the sincerity of your grief, and the depth of the impression made on your minds by this awful dispensation, by acting up fully to the spirit of that ordinance of the common council of the capital of your native state, which prohibits all public amusements for the space of four months from its date, and that during this period at least, you will religiously abstain from every species of public amusement, and more especially from an attendance at the theatre. Whilst your native state mourns with such bitter anguish, it is no time for you to be seen in the scenes of gaiety and dissipation. But I hope you do not need this caution.

I will now bring this discourse to a conclusion, by making a few general reflections, which seem to be suggested by the occasion, and which may assist us in making the proper improvement of this distressing visitation of Almighty God.

1. How vain and precarious are all earthly possessions and enjoyments! How uncertain is life itself!—How near are we often to death when unconscious of any danger!—How soon may the 21 most flourishing families be desolated and almost extinguished!—Of how little real value are those things, for the acquisition of which mankind toil with such indefatigable industry!—How soon is the most princely fortune dissipated, or the owner snatched away from its possession, before the period allotted for its enjoyment, has arrived! Whilst infatuated mortals are flattering themselves with the prospect of long and uninterrupted pleasure, and like the rich man mentioned in the gospel, saying, “Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry, for thou hast much goods laid up for many years;” God, in his holy providence says “Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee. And then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?”

What empty bubbles also, are the honors of office, the dignity of power, the eclat of talents, the fame of conquest, and the applause of the world! What a fading flower

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is beauty, and its attendant graces and accomplishments! And how strikingly is this exemplified in the melancholy scene which we have been this day contemplating! To receive the full impression of this truth, you must cast your eyes on that long and mournful procession, which slowly ascends the Capitol Hill. You must draw near and inspect the contents of those huge coffins which contain all the earthly remains of once celebrated beauty.—But ah! instead of the brilliant eye, the fair complexion, the winning smile, and the indescribable charm of countenance, you now behold ghastly skulls, mangled limbs, bones and ashes, indiscriminate; so that neither age, nor sex, nor colour any longer can be recognized. Let then the pride of beauty cease, and the vain flatterer's incense too. And what shall we say of the pleasures of the senses, of the gratifications of appetite, of the indulgence of the passions, of the entertainments of fancy, and of the feast of intellect? Hear the answer of an oracle, whose responses are never vague and ambiguous: “Surely, every man walketh in a vain show.”—“Verily, every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity.”—“Surely, they are disquieted in vain: They heap up riches and know not who shall gather them.” They make trial of ‘mirth and pleasure,’ and behold the end is found to be ‘vanity.’—“I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what doeth it?” They give their hearts to ‘madness and folly,’ and the fruit is ‘vexation of spirit.’ The young man rejoiceth, and his heart cheereth him in the days of his youth, and he walketh in the ways of his heart and the sight of his eyes, but considereth not that for all these things God will bring him into judgment. Even ‘in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.’ ‘ *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. But the conclusion of the whole matter is, To fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; For God shall bring, every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.* ’

2. How cold, how dark, and comfortless, is the system of infidelity, to persons overwhelmed with calamity, and suffering under the pressure of heavy affliction! The idea of obscuring and extinguishing the pleasing and necessary light of revelation, was never first entertained by the sons of adversity. This scheme was never intended, nor calculated

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to tranquillize the perturbations, and sooth the agonies, of a soul rent with anguish. What consolation does it offer to the bereaved parent, to the disconsolate widow, to the destitute orphan, and to indigent and diseased old age? What relief to the alarmed and struggling sinner, held fast in the grasp of death? To such it presents no brighter prospect than the blackness of despair.

The following narrative may be depended on, as substantially correct: "In a populous town on this continent, a gentleman of some learning and talents, distinguished himself by his zeal for infidelity; and he was unhappily but too successful in poisoning the minds of many young persons with his libertine principles. In the number of his proselytes was a young lawyer, of good education and promising talents, who appeared confidently to adopt these new opinions, without entering, however, into any careful or impartial investigation of the subject;—but relying implicitly on the plausible representations and 24 confident assertions of his friend, who assured him in the most positive terms, that Christianity was a fable and religion a dream. This last mentioned gentleman being seized with a mortal fit of illness, his young disciple hastened to his chamber, and accosted him in the following manner: "Dear sir, I have been led by your advice and influence to adopt a system which I am anxious to see proved in this honest hour and trying situation, to which you are come; tell me, I conjure you by our friendship, plainly and candidly; are you satisfied? Do your sentiments afford you peace and comfort in the near prospect of death?" The sick gentleman, much agitated, and casting a look of horrid consternation on his young friend, exclaimed, "*All is darkness and uncertainty,*" and in a few minutes expired. The scene left too deep an impression on the mind of the young lawyer ever to be erased. He renounced the tenets of infidelity from that moment, and began to make himself acquainted with the sacred scriptures, which he found to contain the true secret of a peaceful death, as well as a happy immortality."

Indeed, so conscious are the abettors of infidel principles, that they are badly qualified to administer consolation to the distressed and dying, that they seldom apply them for the comfort of their friends in these circumstances; and what is worst of all, they often fail the

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infidel himself, when he most needs their support; as witness Voltaire, 25 Diderot, and a host of inferior names. I have, indeed, read somewhere, of an instance of one of these modern philosophers attempting to console his dying wife, by preaching to her the doctrine, that *death was an eternal sleep*; but the good lady being better instructed, and entertaining better hopes, rejected the *miserable comfort*, with pious indignation.

Infidelity was the product of pride and licentiousness combined. Its object was to break down the restraints of conscience, to separate remorse from crime, and to banish fear from the guilty. It never ought to be considered as an evidence of superior understanding or information; for it has been repeatedly proved that the balance of genius, learning and worth, were greatly on the side of revelation. And every young man should repel every solicitation to embrace this deadly system, with horror and indignation. For scepticism, once admitted into the soul, may not be so easily cast out, even when we desire it, and stand in need of better consolations.

3. What an invaluable gift to suffering humanity is the christian religion! It is true, it does not remove our earthly afflictions; but it mitigates and sanctifies them. It does not make this world a satisfying portion; but it brings a better world into view. If it strips earthly objects of their fictitious and bewitching charms, it is to prevent our being deceived and seduced by them. If it forbids *pleasure*, it is to put us in possession of 26 *happiness*. If it requires self-denial, it compensates a hundred fold for the pain occasioned, by the peace of conscience, and joy of self-conquest which it inspires. The tears of repentance which it commands, it converts into streams of consolation. It turns our heaviest afflictions to our advantage; and our greatest losses become our richest gain. It prepares us for exertion and for suffering—teaches us how to live and how to die. It is this divine religion which sweetens the coarse fare, and softens the hard bed of poverty: which soothes the anguish of the heart broken with sorrow, and fills up the chasm produced in the mind by the bereavement of beloved friends:—which binds up and heals those *wounds in the spirit* which no other remedy can reach. Yes; Religion, despised and neglected as it is, is after all, the only sure refuge of the afflicted, and solace of the wretched. It is that alone,

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which can smooth the rugged path that leads down to the valley of the shadow of death: and which often sheds a cheering light on that gloomy vale of tears. But it does more:—It discovers to us the glory, and brings us to the possession of those happy regions where there are no more sighs and tears;—where no sad tidings overwhelm the soul;—where no storms blow—no destructive fires burn—no sickness wastes—no sounds of horrid war disturb the eternal peace: There is *the rest which remaineth for the people of God*; —there dwells the society which is completely blessed: There the glorious 3477-251 Lot-38 27 Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, having himself ‘endured the cross, despising the shame,’ now sits highly exalted on his throne of majesty, resplendent with all the glories of Deity, which beam through his face and diffuse happiness among unnumbered millions.

But, in order to enjoy the consolations of religion, we must practise its precepts; and in order to practise its precepts, we must experience its power. True religion is not a *form*, but a living principle within;—not a *name*, but an active, energetic influence, which governs the whole man, and directs his views and exertions to the noblest objects.

Finally, permit me to conclude this discourse, by considering the dispensation which has occasioned our meeting here this day, in the light of a solemn warning. Yes, my hearers, if ever the warning trumpet of a righteous Providence sounded loudly in our ears, it doth this day. The voice of this dispensation is truly alarming. Let no weak notions, of accident and second causes, keep you from observing the frowns of heaven, which lower over us. Think not that these were ‘sinners above all who dwell in this land, because they suffered such things.’ *I tell you nay: But except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* ”

Often, since the ominous and fatal handwriting on the wall caused the proud kind of Babylon to shake with terror in the midst of his profane mirth 28 and riot, has the awful transition from the gay scenes of dissipation, to the gloomy shades of death, been made in the period of a single night! Often, have the votaries of pleasure been hurried from the festive board, the merry dance, the opera and play; and what is still more dreadful, from scenes of riot and debauchery, into eternity, to answer for their deeds, before the

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tremendous bar of GOD. Receive the warning then, and suffer the word of exhortation. The views and impressions produced by this deplorable occurrence, however painful at the present, may be precious in their effects, and should not be suffered to pass off without originating such resolutions and purposes, as shall become the foundation of a new course of life. You may never in the whole period of your lives, find a season so favourable, to shake off the undue influence of the world, and to break with every darling lust and besetting sin. My last advice, therefore, is, **BECOME REAL CHRISTIANS**. Make religion a personal concern. Attend to it without delay. "Remember now thy in the days of thy youth." And may the God of all grace crown the exercises of this day with his blessing, for Christ's sake.—Amen.